

6th year reflection

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On the 20th of May 2026, 139 students will graduate as part of the Class of 2026, marking the end of a six-year journey that has shaped each of us in different ways. While we will stand as a collective on that day, each student will carry their own unique story—defined by laughter, hardship, friendship, and perseverance. Perseverance is the word that epitomises our year group. Since arriving wearing face masks in 2020 to the day we graduate in May 2026, our year group has displayed resilience in the face of adversity. With our final school days fast approaching, it is certainly scary to realise just how quickly the years have flown.

Beginning 1st year in August 2020 feels like a lifetime ago. In March of that year, our primary school journey was cut short as we were forced to quarantine due to the Coronavirus pandemic. For any 1st year group, the transition from primary school to secondary school is daunting, but in our case, it was far more challenging. Masks, social distancing, and Perspex screens were just as important as our schoolbooks in these early days. Coming from the Heath NS, the school felt like an intimidating monument of staircases and never-ending corridors. I was incredibly grateful to have wonderful Meitheal leaders during this time, who guided us around the school and organised activities that brought our year group together.

Our year group will never forget the fabled “overflow class” in the library, where students were sent when a class was too full. It is bizarre to look back on. Half the class would join lessons via Microsoft Teams from down the corridor due to COVID-19 restrictions. Then came January 2021. Having just about navigated an already turbulent first term, schools were once again placed into lockdown, and we had to adjust to “online school.” It is safe to say that the January–April period of online learning was a challenging time for both students and teachers, who were forced to grapple with the monotony of remote education. I do not think I have ever been as happy to return to school as I was on the day after Easter break in 1st year.

It took until January 2022, the middle of 2nd year, for face masks and Perspex screens to be removed. These subtle changes made a massive difference. Social distancing was left in the past, and it was during this period that our group began to develop into a more tight-knit community. The COVID restrictions that once set us apart ultimately brought us closer together.

Without a doubt, some of our best memories were formed in Transition Year. In September 2023, we embarked on a year of experience and activities, and we were told the famous line by TY coordinator Mr. Cahillane: “You get out of it what you put

in.” It may be cliché, but it was certainly true. From Mini-Company to Debating to Sci-Fest, this year provided a wide range of opportunities for students to develop new skills. The variety of experiences available ensured that everyone had the chance to get involved and make their mark. The highlight of our year was our school musical, All Shook Up. Alongside Scoil Chríost Rí, we sold out three nights in the Dunamais Theatre and created memories we will never forget. Our next experience was our foreign trip to Italy, where we visited Lake Garda, Venice, Milan, and Verona. Thanks to the wonderful Transition Year programme in our school, a whole reflection could be written on that year alone.

September 2024 marked our return to reality after a year of fun and exploration. We had to knuckle down for our final two years of the Leaving Cycle. Lots of homework and study defined much of that year. As a year group, we were lucky to have Mr. White as our year head, who emphasised the importance of study and discipline throughout our Leaving Cycle. 6th year began T-41 weeks before June 3rd, 2026, when Mr. White set up a Teams group to offer us support and encouragement over the weeks that followed. Every Sunday night, a quote and some advice was posted to the page to spur our year group on towards achieving our goals. As a year marked by pre-mocks, mocks, projects, and orals, these simple messages of support were greatly needed.

My favourite quote from our year head came at T-14 weeks: “Life is the most difficult exam.” Over the last six years, this is an idea that our year group has certainly come to understand. Much emphasis is placed on exams, but while they are important, they are not the “be all and end all” and do not define us.

On the 9th of April 2023, our school community was heartbroken to learn of the death of David Brown. I had known David since childhood, and we had been friends since before primary school, both attending Heath NS together. Later that year, on the 9th of August, our school was faced with another profound loss with the passing of Ronan McNamara. David and Ronan were our friends, classmates, and teammates. At just 16 years of age, they left our year group far too soon. Grappling with such immense loss was not easy for any of us. In the face of heartbreak, as I mentioned at the beginning, our year group showed enormous perseverance. In the weeks and months that followed, there was a quiet strength among us. People looked out for one another in ways that did not always need to be spoken aloud. The hardest test our year group faced was not the exams in June, but rather coming to terms with the loss of two of our friends. As Mr. White said, “Life is the most difficult exam.” It is safe to say our year group has faced this test in an admirable way. Though they may not stand beside us on our graduation day, the memory of David and Ronan lives on amongst our year group. We have never forgotten the impact they left on our lives.

At the time of writing, it is exactly 30 days until I graduate. I am sure that the next month will bring further reflection and many more good memories. It will be a time of happiness, excitement, and I am sure, sadness as well. I look forward to celebrating the end of this chapter alongside those with whom I have shared the last six years. Over the past few weeks, I have found myself reflecting on the good times, the bad times, the happy times, and the sad times that have shaped our journey. These memories have made me realise just how much we have grown as a year group. As we move forward, they will remain with us, reminding us of everything we have experienced together. At the beginning of the school year, at the annual mass, we were encouraged to “shine a light.” As we prepare to leave, that message feels more meaningful than ever. It is a reminder that wherever we go next, we carry with us the ability to make a positive impact. While our time here is ending, the light we have shared as a year group will continue to burn within each of us.